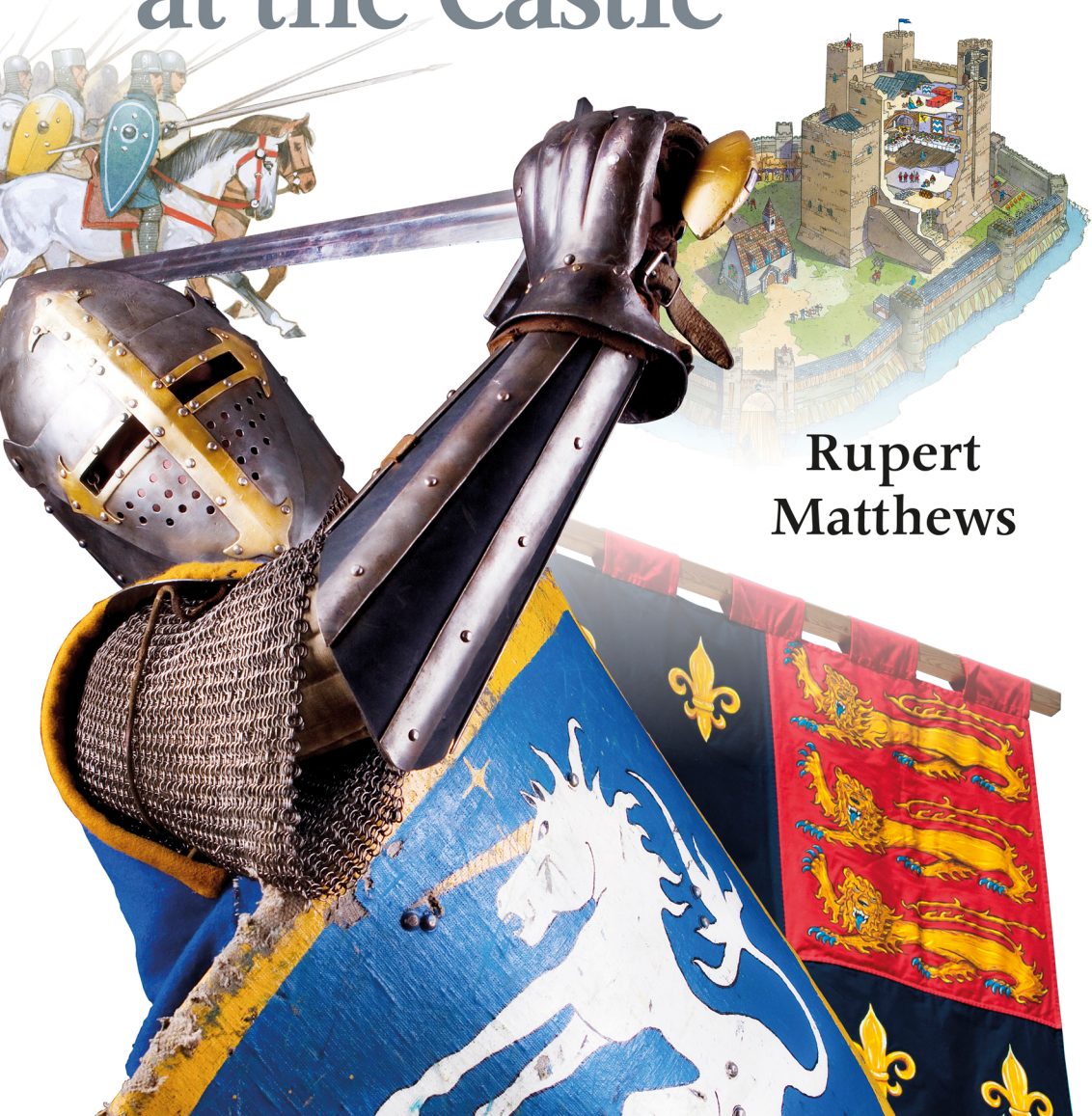


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# Battle at the Castle



Rupert  
Matthews



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First American Edition, 2014  
Published in the United States by DK Publishing  
345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
001—256581—June/14

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Published in Great Britain by Dorling Kindersley Limited.

A catalog record for this book is available  
from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: 978-1-4654-2005-3 (Paperback)  
ISBN: 978-1-4654-2004-6 (Hardback)

DK books are available at special discounts when purchased in bulk for  
sales promotions, premiums, fund-raising, or educational use.

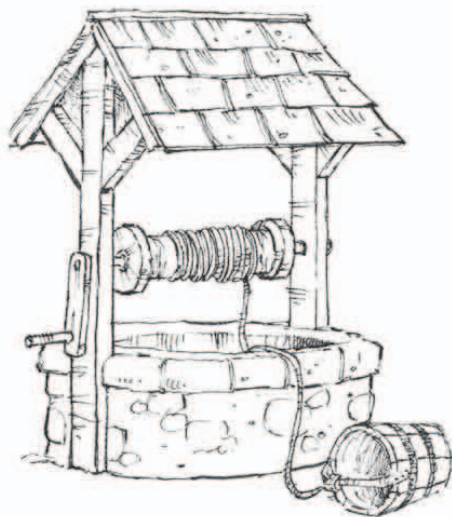
For details, contact:  
DK Publishing Special Markets  
345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014  
SpecialSales@dk.com

Printed and bound in China  
by South China Printing Company.

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# BATTLE AT THE CASTLE

Written by  
*Rupert Matthews*



# MISSIVE 1

*To Lady Eleanor, daughter of  
Sir William Bekes of Horton  
in the County of Kent*





*Greetings sister,*

We have arrived at Oxney Castle.  
My master, Sir Edmund Perry, is  
being treated well by Lord Oxney.  
We have our own room in  
the West Tower. I even have my  
very own sack of straw to sleep on.

Our journey was tiring, but  
enjoyable. Sir Edmund was mounted  
on his gray horse, and I rode the  
pony and led the two packhorses.

We saw a man in a coracle  
fishing as we crossed the Great  
Stour River. Sir Edmund bought  
four fish for a ha'penny from him,  
and I fried them for our lunch.



We stayed the night with some monks at a priory. Sir Edmund slept in the Prior's house. I slept in the stable with our horses.

The next day, we left at dawn. On our way, we saw a huge pile of wood stacked next to a church. Sir Edmund said the priest would set the wood on fire if the French attacked. Then soldiers would come. Every town near the coast has a war beacon like this.



We arrived at Oxney Castle in the afternoon. It is a small castle with one large stone tower called a keep in the middle. Around the keep is a stone wall with smaller towers. Inside the wall is an area called the bailey. It is mostly grass, but there are several store sheds and workshops. Everyone is very friendly.

### **Squire's daily duties**

A squire was a young boy serving a knight and training to be a knight. He would wake before dawn to start his duties. His duties included helping the knight get dressed and fetching and cleaning equipment.

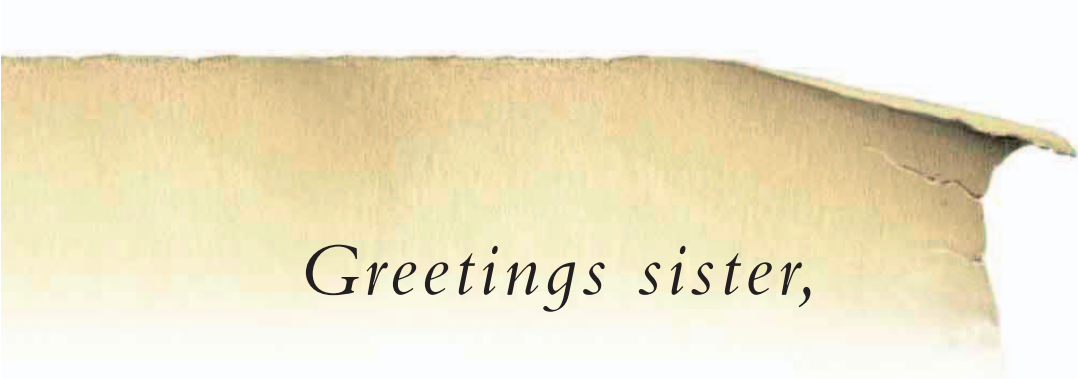




## MISSIVE 2

*To Lady Eleanor, daughter of  
Sir William Bekes of Horton  
in the County of Kent*



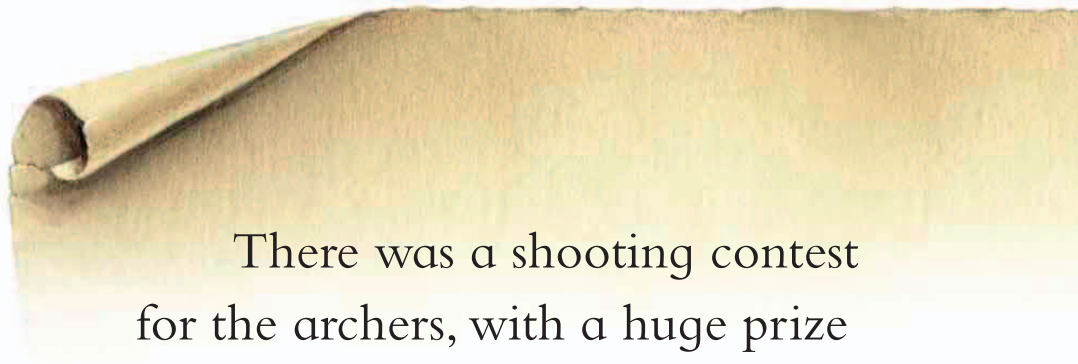


## *Greetings sister,*

It has been three weeks since we arrived at Oxney Castle. We have been very busy because there has been a tournament!

Lord Oxney announced that he would hold a tournament on St. George's Day. He wanted to test the Oxney Array. The Array is made up of the local people who work for the king 40 days each year. Sometimes they repair roads or bridges, but most of the time, they serve in the army.

Sir Edmund was invited to join the contests for the knights.



There was a shooting contest for the archers, with a huge prize of 240 silver pennies.

The men-at-arms had to run in armor from the castle to the village and back again.

The women had cake-baking and sewing contests. They had to stitch a scarf with Lord Oxney's badge—a white bear holding a red sword. The winner was given a whole bolt of Lincoln green cloth—enough to make clothes for 25 people!



The contest for the boys, who set up tents and dig latrines, was very funny. A pig was let loose in a field. The first boy to catch it could keep it, but the pig was covered in grease. That made it very slippery, and I laughed so much, I cried.



Sir Edmund took part in the jousting. Two knights have to charge at each other on their horses. If one knight knocks the other off his horse, he wins. Knights also score points for hitting the other knight's shield, helmet, or body.



Each knight has a different pattern painted on his shield so that people know who he is. Lord Oxney's son, Sir Henry Oxney, had a white unicorn on a green shield. Sir Giles Black of Hythe had a yellow eagle on a black shield.

Sir Edmund took part in five jousts. He was not knocked off his horse at all! He scored five points, which is good. The jousting was won by Sir Giles Black.

### Coat of Arms

In battle, it is important to recognize people at a distance. Most men wear helmets that cover their faces so every knight and lord has his own coat of arms.





## MISSIVE 3

*To Lady Eleanor, daughter of  
Sir William Bekes of Horton  
in the County of Kent*





## *Greetings sister,*

A French army has landed in Hastings! We received this exciting news three days ago. However, many local people are very worried. Lord Oxney is preparing to fight. Sir Edmund has been given command of 50 men from the Array. We have so much to do.

At dawn, the French army ran ashore, armed with swords and axes. They captured the Mayor of Hastings and made him pay 50 pounds of silver. They said they would burn the town if he did not pay.

Lord Oxney issued a Commission of Array. That means that all the Array must come to Oxney Castle, bringing their weapons and armor.

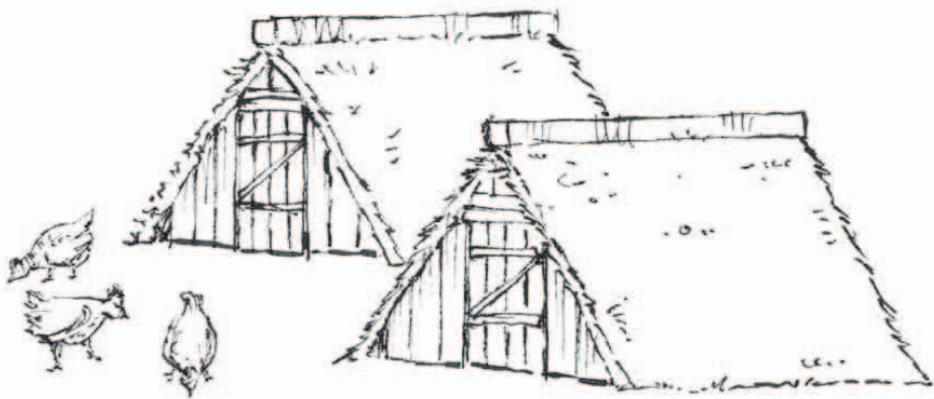
This morning, the French burned Iden, which is less than an hour's walk from here! Sir Edmund told me the French burn a village if the people run away without paying money.





The people from Oxney have been coming to the castle. They are bringing their farm animals, money, grain, and farm tools. About 200 people are now camped in the bailey. They have built some wooden sheds to sleep in.

The people believe they will be safe here. They say the stone walls will stop the French soldiers. I hope they are right.





## MISSIVE 4

*To Lady Eleanor, daughter of  
Sir William Bekes of Horton  
in the County of Kent*

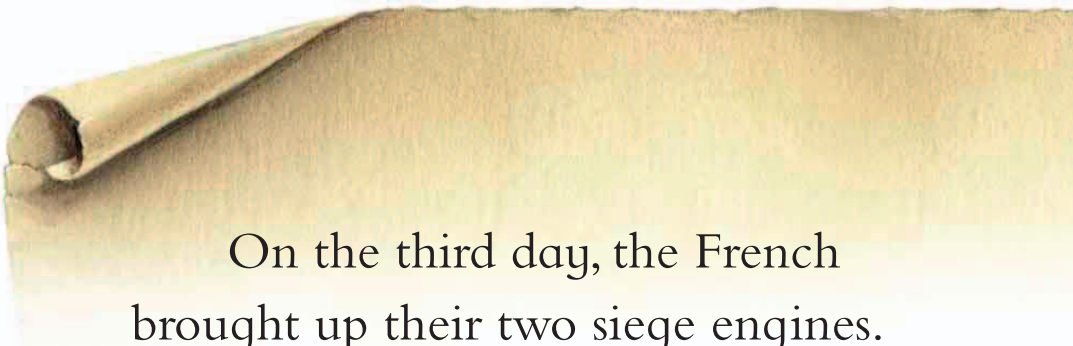




## *Sister,*

We are in great danger. You must help us. The siege is going badly for us. Let me explain.

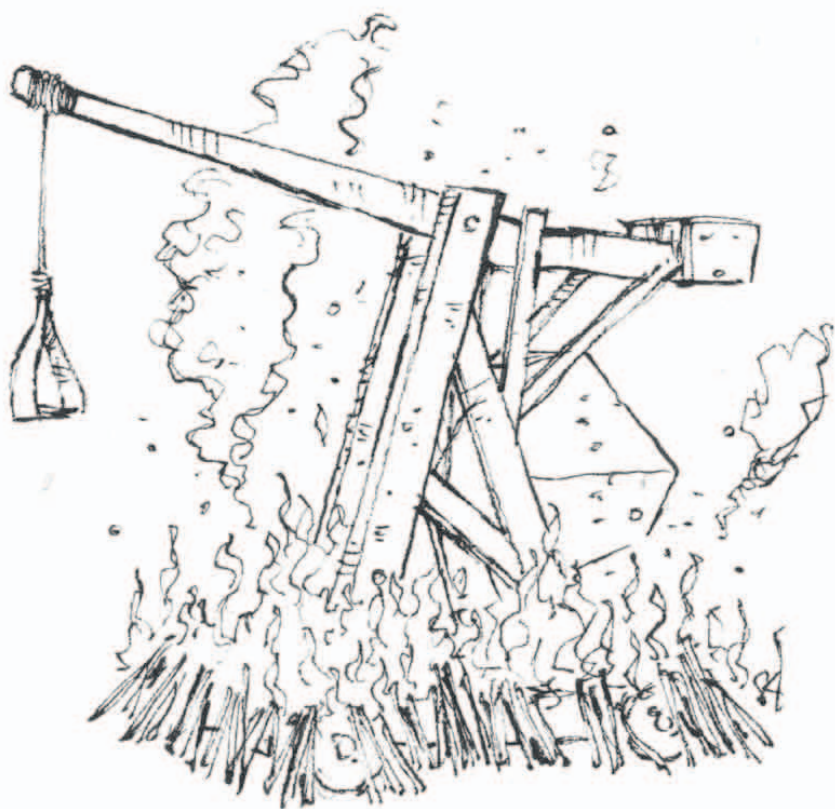
A French herald came to Oxney Castle to ask for 100 pounds of silver. Lord Oxney refused, so the French army arrived and the siege began. We watched from the castle walls. We saw knights, crossbowmen, men-at-arms, men with spears, men with axes, and Baron de Gilles. The Baron had a coat of arms of a green dragon on a yellow shield. Beside him rode a man carrying a large flag with the green dragon.

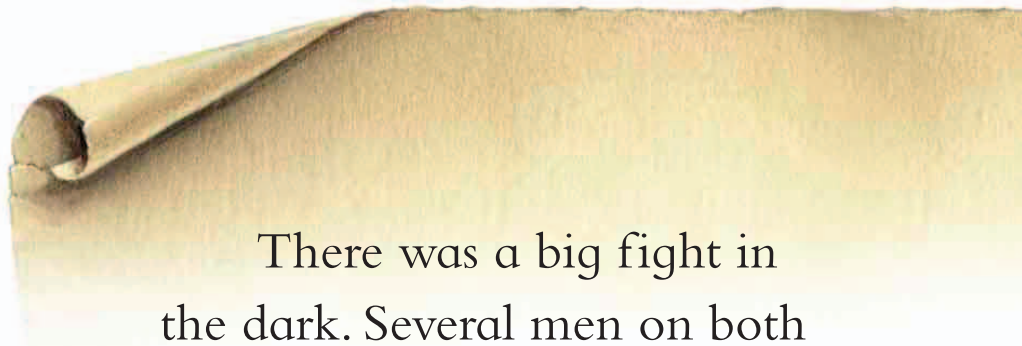


On the third day, the French brought up their two siege engines. The ballista shot large wooden bolts at the gate. Every time a bolt hit, the gate shook, but it did not break. The trebuchet threw large rocks that went up high then crashed down. Some landed in the bailey, smashing anything they hit. Several people were killed. One stone hit the keep and made a hole in the roof.

Lord Oxney told Sir Edmund to destroy the siege engines. That night, Sir Edmund led his 50 men out of a small gate.

We crept toward the siege engines.  
When we got there, we began  
piling up bundles of twigs.  
Then Sir Edmund told me to light  
a fire. The French saw the flames  
and attacked.



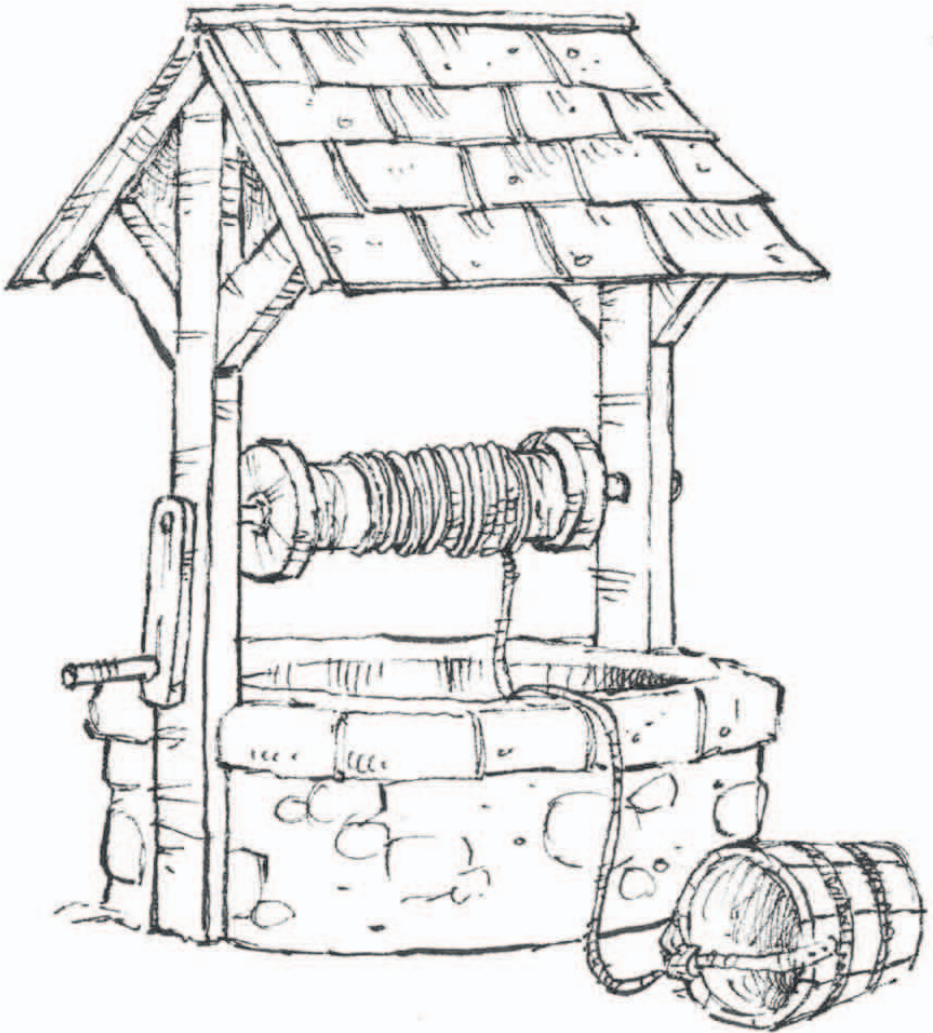


There was a big fight in the dark. Several men on both sides were killed. We carried our wounded back to the castle. Then we watched as the trebuchet burned, but the ballista was not destroyed.

The next morning, a terrible thing happened. The well ran dry. You know how dry the weather has been. The underground stream beneath the castle has no water in it. We have plenty of food and weapons, but we cannot live without water. You must tell father. Tell him we need an army to help us. I send this message in the hands



of a boy who says he can get over  
the fence. God save us all.





## MISSIVE 5

*To Lady Eleanor, daughter of  
Sir William Bekes of Horton  
in the County of Kent*



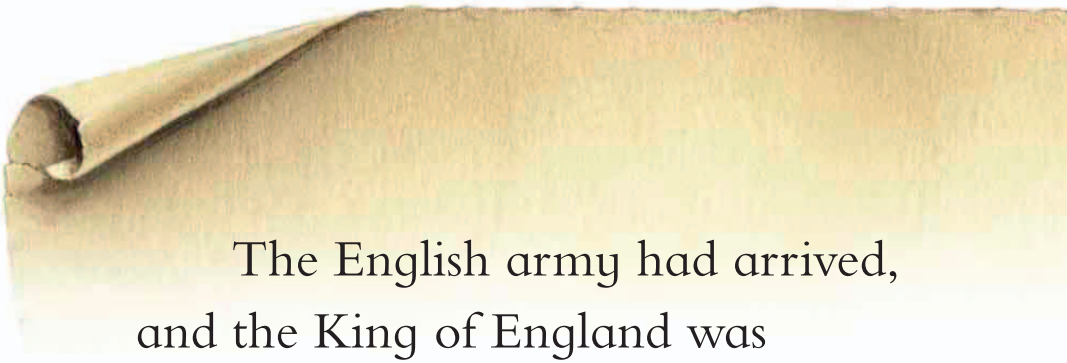


*Greetings sister,*

Good news! The siege of Oxney Castle is over. We are safe. Thank you, dear sister, thank you.

At dawn this morning, the lookout shouted for Lord Oxney. We all went up to the walls and saw Baron de Gilles on his horse, shouting orders. The Frenchmen were taking down their tents. They put on their armor and formed up in lines ready for battle.

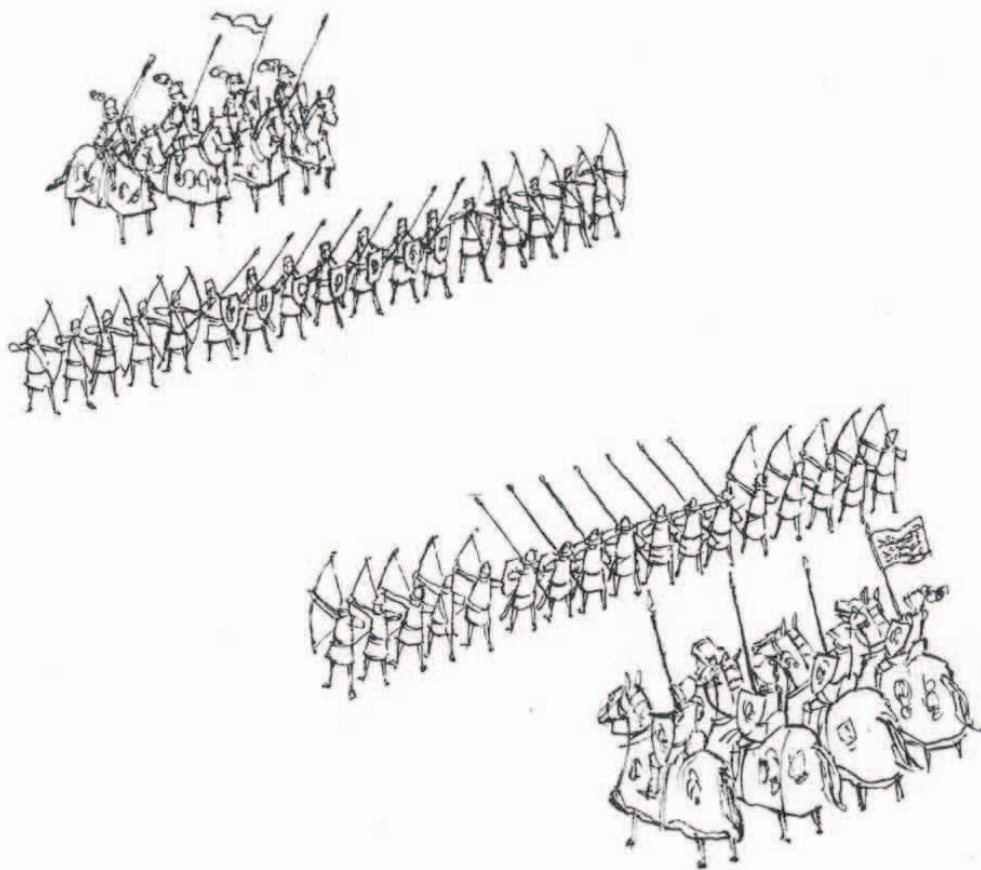
Far to the north, we saw a great column of smoke from a war beacon.



The English army had arrived,  
and the King of England was  
with them. They drew up, facing  
the French with the knights  
in the middle and the archers  
on either side. The men on  
horseback were behind them.  
Then the battle began.

The English archers shot their  
arrows at the French. The French  
charged forward. There was  
a loud whistling noise as thousands  
of arrows flew through the air.  
All the French wore armor, but  
several were killed or wounded.  
The English knights were singing.

There was a loud crash as  
the two armies met. We heard  
the noise of swords hitting shields.  
Men were shouting in anger or  
screaming in pain.

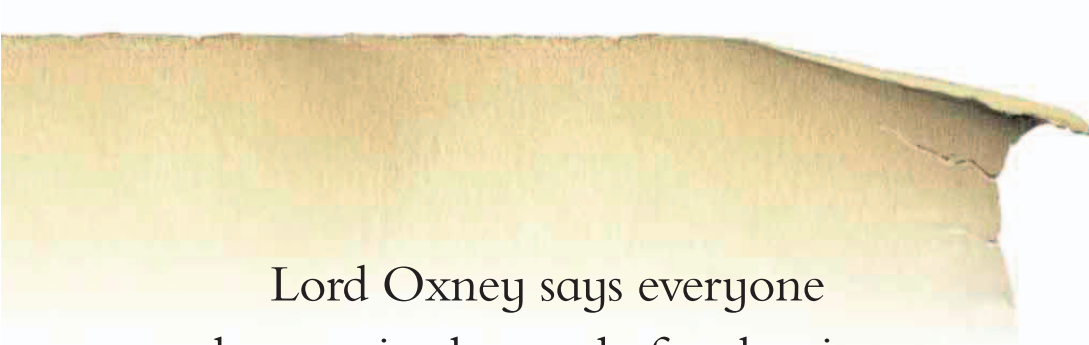




Suddenly, the French turned and fled. The English horsemen chased them, killing some and taking others prisoner. Baron de Gilles escaped back to his ship. He forgot to take his chest of silver, so the Mayor of Hastings got his money back!



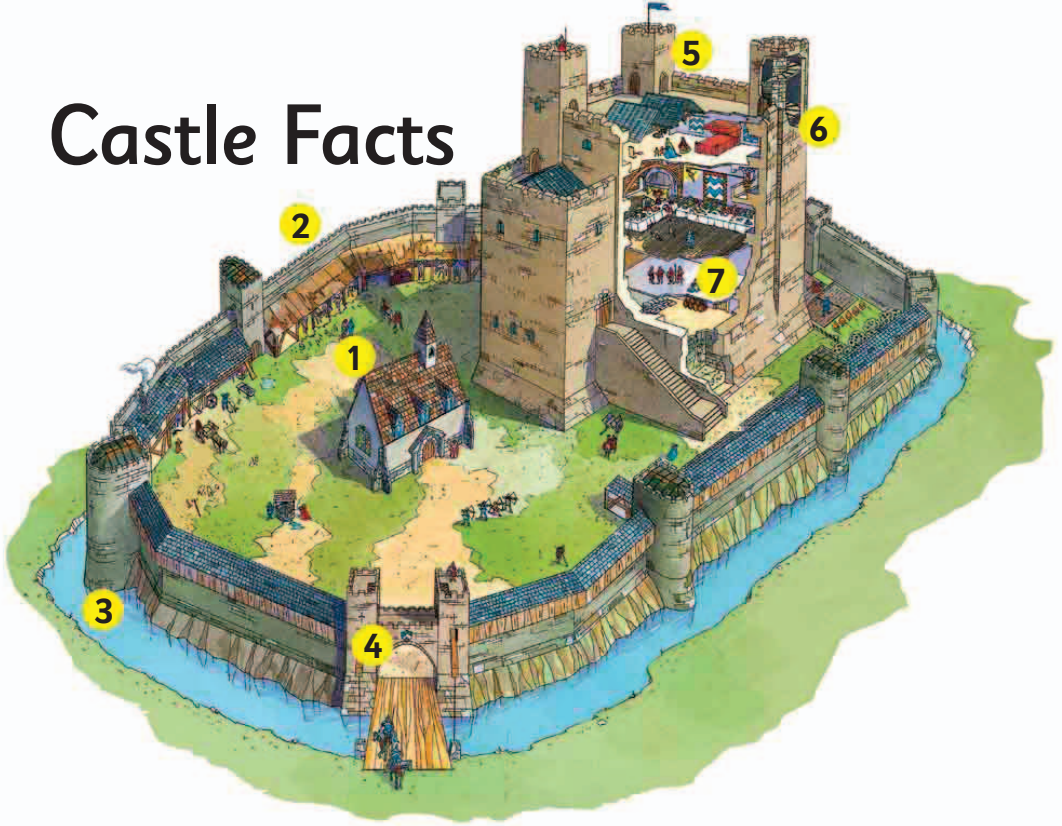




Lord Oxney says everyone who was in the castle for the siege will get a new set of clothes—even shoes and underwear. He is paying for it all. I am getting a suit of brown woolen cloth with brass buttons.

The King is staying here and Lord Oxney is holding a great feast to celebrate defeating the French. I send you an invitation with this missive. Please come. Everyone wants to thank you for getting the message to the King.

# Castle Facts



## 1. Bailey

During a siege, local people camp here for safety.

## 2. Walls

The stone walls protect the bailey from attack.

## 3. Moat

The moat is filled with water to make an attack more difficult.

## 4. Gatehouse

The gate is the weakest part of the defenses.

## 5. Tower

Men in the towers shoot arrows at the attackers.

## 6. Keep

This is the strongest tower in the castle. It is the last defense if the enemy enters the bailey.

## 7. Great hall

The Lord of the castle uses the hall for meals. Most of the castle staff sleep in here.

# Glossary

## **ballista**

a giant bow

## **bolt**

medieval unit  
of measurement  
about 40 yards  
(36.5 meters) long

## **coracle**

small, round boat

## **ha'penny**

coin worth half of  
a penny

## **herald**

messenger

## **missive**

written message  
or letter

## **siege**

when an army  
surrounds and  
tries to capture  
a castle

## **trebuchet**

a giant sling



# Index

archer 10, 26

armor 10, 16, 25, 26

Array 9, 15, 16

bailey 7, 17, 20, 30

ballista 20, 22, 31

Baron de Gilles

19, 25, 28

coat of arms 13, 19

fence 23

herald 19

keep 7, 20, 30

King of England 26, 29

knight 7, 9, 12, 13, 19, 26

Lord Oxney 5, 9, 10,

13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 25, 29

Oxney Castle 5, 7, 9,

16, 19, 25

St. George's Day 9

tournament 9

trebuchet 20, 22, 31

war beacon 6, 25

weapons 16, 22

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